

Thinking, Conceiving, and Idealism in Spinoza

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Abstract: This paper concerns the relationship between the *mental* (ideas, minds, and the attribute of thought) and the *conceptual* (concepts, conceiving, and conceptual dependence) in Spinoza. I argue against the natural and pervasive assumption that Spinoza's appeals to the conceptual are synonymous with appeals to the mental. I show instead that conceptual relations are attribute-neutral for Spinoza; mental relations comprise a proper subset of conceptual relations. This surprising conclusion, that the conceptual outstrips the mental, also sheds new light on the relationship between the attributes, the extent of parallelism, and the nature of extension. It also shows how Spinoza's frequent privileging of the conceptual avoids collapsing into idealism.

1. Introduction

What, according to Spinoza, is the relationship between the realm of the mental – ideas, minds, and the attribute of thought – and the realm of the conceptual – concepts, conceiving, and conceptual dependence? It would be easy to read Spinoza's frequent appeals to the conceptual as synonymous with appeals to the mental, but this pervasive interpretive assumption would have disastrous consequences for Spinoza's metaphysics and ought to be rejected – or so I will argue here. I will argue instead that conceptual relations are attribute-neutral for Spinoza; mental relations comprise a proper subset of conceptual relations. This surprising conclusion, that the conceptual outstrips the mental, runs counter to a thesis about conceptual relations that has been prominent since at least Locke, a thesis I will call *mentalism*: every conceptual relation is a mental relation. My main contention in this paper is that Spinoza rejects mentalism, a rejection that prevents some of his central metaphysical beliefs from otherwise collapsing into incoherence. In addition to textual infidelity, locating the domain of the conceptual entirely within the domain of the mental would wreak havoc on central Spinozistic doctrines such as attribute plenitude, the conceptual barrier between Thought and Extension, and parallelism.¹

¹ Following Spinoza, I will put all mental relations and entities under the term "Thought", which I will capitalize when using it alone to refer to the attribute of thought (as with "Extension").

Although the interpretive consequences of misunderstanding Spinoza on this point are steep, few if any interpreters have explicitly addressed the relation between the mental and the conceptual in Spinoza. I suspect that is because the matter seems so easily and innocuously settled; *of course* when Spinoza says, for instance, that a mode is conceived through its substance, he is invoking some kind of mental relation. But far from simple or trivial, correctly interpreting the relationships between thinking and conceiving, ideas and concepts, and more generally, the mental and the conceptual in Spinoza will take us deep into the heart of his metaphysics and shed new light on several long-standing issues in Spinoza scholarship – including the relationship between the attributes, the extent of parallelism, and the nature of extension (sections 2 and 3). Disentangling the mental from the conceptual in Spinoza will also allow us to acknowledge that conceptual relations play a pervasive and fundamental role in Spinoza’s system without embracing any alleged idealistic implications of such conceptual priority. Indeed, I argue in section 4 that the best and also the most recent case for interpreting Spinoza in a certain idealist light, one advanced by Michael Della Rocca, falters precisely here in its failure to properly distinguish the mental from the conceptual in Spinoza. In the final coda, I return to a longstanding worry about Spinoza’s overly mental definition of an attribute in Id4.²

2. Four Theses about Attributes

Jonathan Bennett has complained about “a lopsidedness in Spinoza’s system which he does not mention, could not explain, and should not have tolerated”.³ Bennett was concerned, to put it mildly, about Spinoza’s apparent privileging of the attribute of thought in his definition of an attribute in Id4, making it “special” in a way that undermines the balanced picture of the attributes Spinoza usually seems to want.⁴ But the scope of Bennett’s concern can be expanded well beyond Id4.

For throughout the *Ethics*, Spinoza uses conceptual relations as the *explanans* of his central metaphysical machinery, making him repeatedly vulnerable to Bennett’s charge of lopsidedness – at least on the seemingly

² All citations from Spinoza are from *Opera* (cited as G). All otherwise unlabeled references to Spinoza’s text refer to the internal references of the *Ethics* by standard Part-TypeNumber (e.g., Ip33). English translations of the *Ethics*, TIE, and KV are from Curley’s translation in *Collected Works*, sometimes with slight modification.

³ Bennett 1984, 62.

⁴ Another sense in which Thought may be unbalanced or lopsided is insofar as it contains representations of the modes of other attributes, a kind of double-reflection that, e.g., extended bodies lack. Idealist interpreters at the turn of the 20th century often complained about *this* sense of imbalance as well, but I will not address it here. (For more, see Newlands 2011.)

innocuous assumption that conceptual relations are exclusively mental relations. Spinoza defines his basic ontological categories of substance and modes in terms of conceptual relations (IIId3 and Id5). He explains causation, or at least self-causation, in terms of conceptual dependence (Id1). Even the “in” relation, that most vexing form of dependence in Spinoza’s system, has at least a conceptual condition attached to it: things are in that through which they are conceived (Id3 and Id5).⁵

Spinoza also defines the relation among the attributes in conceptual terms (Ip10; IIp1–7), and then uses the conceptual independence of the attributes to defend substance monism (Ip14), attribute plentitude (Ip11), a mind-body identity theory (IIp7), and an intensional theory of causation (IIp6). Additionally, Spinoza appeals to the conceptual in his theories of modality (Ip35), of essences (IIId2), of individuation (IIp13L7s), of the affects (IIIDefAffIe), and of moral obligation (IVp18s), to name a few less familiar examples. There also exists a *conceptual* bridge between the metaphysics of the early parts of the *Ethics* and the explicitly ethical later parts of the book. Indeed, conceptual sensitivity and conceptual dependence are among the central philosophical tools in Spinoza’s mature thought. In short, understanding Spinoza’s system requires understanding his ubiquitous and systematic appeals to the conceptual.

However, to push Bennett’s concern further, on the assumption that all conceptual relations fall under the attribute of thought, Spinoza’s pervasive appeals to the conceptual will give pride of place to Thought throughout the *Ethics* in the same way that Bennett objected to in Id4. Hence, if all conceptual relations are mental relations (as many in the early modern period believed and some still believe today), then in addition to potentially conflating metaphysics and psychology⁶ or paving the way for idealism, Spinoza will be guilty of a *very* pervasive error that he could neither accept nor avoid, one that renders internally inconsistent the bulk of his philosophical system.

My main concern in this paper is not to defend the assertion that Spinoza’s metaphysics are so driven by his appeals to conceptual relations. Rather, my aim is to show that Spinoza’s repeated appeals to conceptual relations do not produce the kind of Thought-heavy, idealist-friendly lopsidedness that worried Bennett. In fact, it is precisely *because* Spinoza so sharply distinguishes the conceptual from the mental that he is able to

⁵ Elsewhere (Newlands 2010), I have argued that Spinoza endorses an even stronger position, which I call “Conceptual Dependence Monism”, the view that conceptual dependence is the *only* form of metaphysical dependence. But worries about Spinoza’s reliance on conceptual relations arise independent of this stronger view.

⁶ Bennett has charged Spinoza with confusing metaphysics and psychology, claiming that Spinoza “ignore[s] the difference between mental items and third-realm [i.e., logical or metaphysical] ones” (Bennett 1984, 52). I will show here, on the contrary, that Spinoza distinguishes metaphysics from psychology (to use Bennett’s categories) precisely in his distinction between the conceptual and the mental.

achieve the balanced picture of the attributes that Bennett rightly thinks Spinoza wanted in the first place.

More explicitly, the expanded version of Bennett's concern contains two steps:

- (a) Spinoza's privileging of conceptual relations entails a privileging of the mental;
- (b) Spinoza's privileging of the mental is inconsistent with several core doctrines about attributes that he clearly held.

The bulk of this paper will be dedicated to denying (a), though I will quickly explain and motivate (b).

Some of Spinoza's views about attributes are embroiled in deep, century-spanning interpretative controversies. Thankfully, we can find enough trouble just by sticking to four doctrines about attributes that are almost universally acknowledged to having been endorsed by Spinoza. I will label them the doctrines of *attribute plenitude*, *attribute independence*, *attribute parallelism*, and *attribute parity*. Here is a minimalist version of each that most interpreters accept.

Attribute plenitude is the thesis that there exists more than one attribute. That may sound a bit *too* minimal to earn the label "plenitude" – just how many attributes are there, according to Spinoza? The best answer is something like "as many as there can be", i.e., plentifully many attributes, an amount he often glosses as "infinite" (Ip11). Spinoza names two, thought and extension, though he clearly thinks there are more than just these two.⁷ But all we will need is the very uncontroversial claim that Spinoza thinks there is more than one attribute, which he explicitly affirms in IIp1–2.

Attribute independence is the thesis that each attribute is conceptually self-contained. As Spinoza puts this point, "Each attribute of a substance must be conceived through itself" (Ip10). That is, no attribute can be conceived through another attribute; each attribute is conceptually isolated from every other attribute. Della Rocca has labeled this the "conceptual barrier" between the attributes, and has shown how Spinoza draws many

⁷ After referring to the attributes of thought and extension, Spinoza writes, "I understand the same concerning the other attributes" (IIp7s). A more recent advocate of the only-two reading of the attributes is again Bennett, though he readily admits there are several texts standing against his reading. He falls back onto something like a *functionally-only-two* reading, while acknowledging the truth of a *textually-more-than-two* position (Bennett 1984, 75–79; the labels are mine). Yitzhak Melamed has forcefully addressed what seems to be the hardest problem facing the more-than-two attribute reading (thereby overcoming Bennett's case for "functionally only two"): why are we aware of only two if there are so many? (Tschirnhaus asked Spinoza this very question in Ep 63, and Melamed has done the best of anyone I've seen in unpacking Spinoza's very condensed reply in Ep 64, even if some questions remain.) See Melamed (forthcoming).

rich consequences from it.⁸ I will have more to say about this doctrine below, but for now, we need only the very minimal claim that no attribute is conceptually dependent on any other attribute.

Attribute parallelism is the thesis that there is an isomorphism between the attribute of thought and every other attribute such that for every mode *mI*, there exists a mode of Thought *tmI* that represents *mI* and stands in a parallel causal and representative chain to the causal chain in which *mI* stands (IIp7). Again, I think Spinoza's full parallelism doctrine is much richer than this – he identifies *mI* and *tmI*; he thinks parallelism holds between any and every pair of attributes; he uses parallelism itself to provide a theory of mental representation. But all we will need is this: parallelism is an inter-attribute relation between Thought and at least one other attribute. This is clearest in IIp7s: “Therefore, whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes”. So whatever else Spinoza's attribute parallelism involves, it requires a causal parallelism *between* Thought and at least one other attribute.

Lastly, *attribute parity* is the thesis that no attribute is more fundamental than any other attribute; all attributes are on ontologically even-footing, as it were. This is neither identical to, nor entailed by, attribute parallelism. Parallelism points to the fact that there is a kind of structural isomorphism between a pair of attributes, but it is silent on whether that isomorphism is due to some deeper common ground, some kind of “Super-attribute”. Attribute parity denies the existence of any kind of imbalanced Super-attribute.⁹ Bennett is surely right that Spinoza wanted attribute parity, though I am not aware of a passage in which Spinoza directly asserts it. Certainly Spinoza's claim that “all the attributes [that substance] has have always been in it together, and one could not be produced by another” (Ip10s) rules out any kind of temporal or causal priority among the attributes.

But here is a quick, indirect argument for attribute parity in Spinoza. The issue of attribute parity is an issue of dependence: are all attributes on ontologically even footing, or are some attributes less fundamental than others, on which they are grounded and hence depend? In his opening definitions, Spinoza claims that instances of causation and being in are co-extensive with instances of conceptual dependence.¹⁰ Although Spinoza uses numer-

⁸ See Della Rocca 1996.

⁹ That is, whereas parallelism entails mere co-extension, parity denies that such co-extension is the result of any sort of further grounding or priority relation.

¹⁰ See Id1, Id3, Id5, Ip15d. For further textual defense, see Garrett 2002. (As mentioned above in note 5, I think Spinoza's actual view is stronger than mere co-variation, but co-variation is all we need for the above argument to work.) Notice that if conceptual dependence is co-extensive with causal dependence, the passage quoted in the previous paragraph (Ip10s) becomes a good proof-text for attribute parity.

ous synonyms for forms of dependence, each is ultimately equivalent to causation, being in, or being conceived through. Hence, if one attribute, A1, depends in any way on another, A2, then A1 is conceived through A2. However, the conceptual dependence of one attribute on another is explicitly ruled out by the attribute independence doctrine. So the conceptual isolation of attributes plus the co-extension of conceptual dependence with any other form of dependence entails attribute parity. Hence, far from contributing to a lopsided picture of the attributes, Spinoza's frequent invoking of conceptual dependence actually supports Spinoza's attribute parity doctrine.¹¹

With these doctrines in hand, we can now understand the concern in (b). For suppose Spinoza believed that the attribute of thought was the most fundamental attribute. Pretty clearly that would violate *attribute parity*. Suppose further that the way in which Spinoza privileged Thought was by making relations between ideas underlie and constitute the relations between other, non-thinking modes. This would violate *attribute parallelism*, since all cross-attribute relations would in fact be intra-Thought relations. It would also violate *attribute independence*, since features of one attribute, say Extension, would be partly explained and constituted by features of another attribute, Thought, rendering Extension dependent on Thought for its complete characterization. More indirectly, this sort of privileging of Thought would also violate *attribute plenitude* by creating a kind of Super-attribute that would alone answer to Spinoza's account of an attribute as a kind of complete expression of the essence of substance (Ip10s). One would not have to refer to more than this Super-attribute to express the essence of substance; all the other "attributes" would be, as it were, contained in Super-Thought. Since Super-Thought would give an exhaustive expression of the essence of substance, only Super-Thought would earn the name "attribute", thereby violating *attribute plenitude*.¹²

These concerns may sound a bit far-fetched. Sure, *if* Spinoza believed that mental features somehow undergirded all the other attributes and constituted the form of all inter-attribute mode relations, he would be in

¹¹ Strictly speaking, attribute parity is consistent with a scenario in which there existed more than one fundamental attribute *and* several less fundamental attributes, so long as the fundamental attributes were all equally fundamental. Based on the strategy that Spinoza uses in KV I.7 (G I/44–47), my speculation is that Spinoza would just identify those fundamental attributes as the only genuine attributes, in which case this would not really represent a distinct possibility from what minimal attribute plenitude already entails. But once again, we could make due with an even weaker form of attribute parity: there does not exist a single, most fundamental attribute. Since the scenario we will be concerned with is one in which Thought alone is such a fundamental attribute, this hyper-minimalist version of parity would still suffice.

¹² If correct, this reasoning provides another indirect route to attribute parity, since attribute plenitude would entail that there is no single, most fundamental attribute on grounds that such a Super-attribute would alone satisfy Spinoza's description of an attribute, *pace* plenitude.

trouble. That is just to accept step (b). But why think Spinoza does anything like *that*? After all, the point of presenting the case for these four attribute doctrines is to show that Spinoza *does not* privilege Thought in this way.

Enter step (a). Spinoza *does* privilege conceptual relations in this way, defining his ontology of non-mental things in terms of conceptual features and claiming that conceptual relations obtain between any thing and that on which it depends.¹³ As we will see in the next section, Spinoza even describes the relations among attributes and between an attribute and its substance/modifications in conceptual terms. But if every conceptual relation is just a mental relation, then Spinoza will have smuggled all manner of contradictions into the heart of his system under the thin veneer of synonym substitutions. (Even worse, he will have made these blunders in some of the very passages in which he is trying to carefully articulate the above attribute doctrines!) So, the worry goes, we should either find a way of downplaying Spinoza's appeals to the conceptual in his discussion of substance, modes, attributes and cross-attribute relations (among other places in his metaphysics), or else concede to Bennett-minded objectors that Spinoza's system is plagued with stunningly wide-ranging inconsistencies.

Fortunately, there is a way out of this mess that avoids either of these dismal interpretive options: reject step (a). Happily enough, the way to see that Spinoza does just this is to look carefully at the very passages at the beginning of Part Two of the *Ethics* in which Spinoza presents his case for these four attribute doctrines.

3. *Rejecting Mentalism*

The problem raised in the previous section is that we seem confronted with a pair of unpalatable options: deny the pervasiveness of the conceptual in Spinoza's system in order to preserve the parity between the mental and the non-mental, or admit that Spinoza's system contains an unhealthy and indefensible priority of the mental.

However, this dilemma arises on the assumption of a particular view about the relation between the conceptual and the mental, expressed in step (a). I will call the view that conceptual relations are exclusively mental relations "mentalism". There are many ways of fleshing out what counts as being mental, although for present purposes, I will use the term "mental" to refer to any relation or entity falling under Spinoza's attribute of thought. Applied to Spinoza, the mentalist's claim is that all conceptual relations are relations of Thought, a view that has a rich historical legacy since at least the influential views of Locke and Hume.

¹³ For the first, see the definition of a body in IId1 (discussed below), or the more general definition of substances and modes in Id3 and Id5; for the second, see note 10 above.

However, I will now show on neutral grounds that Spinoza rejects mentalism, thereby eliminating the worry that his use of conceptual relations leads to some kind of idealist-friendly, Thought-heavy lopsidedness in his metaphysics. In fact, it will be Spinoza's most anti-idealist doctrines outlined above – attribute plenitude, independence, parallelism, and parity – that prove inconsistent with mentalism. In other words, *mentalism itself conflicts with Spinoza's attribute doctrines*. Hence it should come as no surprise that Spinoza rejects mentalism. I will suggest instead that conceptual relations for Spinoza are attribute-neutral, a claim I will explain further in section 3.1.

Let us begin by asking whether Spinoza believes with mentalism that conceptual relations are exclusively mental relations. There are certainly passages in which Spinoza casually identifies concepts with tokened mental states (“ideas”), such as Vp23: “In God there is necessarily a concept or idea [*conceptus seu idea*] which expresses the essence of the human body”.¹⁴ However, Spinoza is making very different points in these passages, and so he may be speaking a bit loosely.

More worrisome are those passages in which Spinoza appears to carefully associate concepts and ideas, such as his definition of an idea in IId3: “By idea, I understand a concept of the mind [*mentis conceptum*] which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing”.¹⁵ However, in these passages, Spinoza is making points about or “from within” the attribute of thought, and I will argue below that the non-mentalist reading can accept a tight relation between ideas and concepts *within Thought*. So although there is a mentalist-friendly reading of passages like IId3, there is also a consistent non-mentalist interpretation: Spinoza is explicitly referring to an entity within Thought, and so of course he is using “concept” there to refer to a mental thing.¹⁶ (In fact, on the non-mentalist reading, “*mentis conceptum*”

¹⁴ See also IIp49d.

¹⁵ See similar expressions in IIp49s and TIE 62 (G II/24). In his translation, Curley punctuates the same phrase in IIp49s in a potentially misleading way, although the Latin is unambiguous: “*distinguant inter ideam, sive Mentis conceptum, & inter imagines rerum, quas imaginamur*”.

¹⁶ One may still wonder about the apparent mentalism of IId3e, which reads, “I say concept rather than perception [in IId3] because the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the mind”. First, notice that the same non-mentalist move is available here: Spinoza is explaining his definition of a *mental* entity, so he naturally assumes the context of Thought. And within Thought, as we will see, concepts *are* structured mental representations. In addition, Spinoza's intended point in IId3e lies elsewhere: he is emphasizing the *active* nature of these mental entities. Concepts of the mind, i.e., ideas, are not passive perceptions, a point that foreshadows the anti-Cartesian conclusion of IIp49. Lastly, this passage does not require the non-mentalist interpreter to read “perception” as similarly attribute-neutral; perception may well be a purely mental relation for Spinoza. (I am grateful to an anonymous referee for asking about this passage.)

becomes a non-redundant expression: just as there are mental concepts, there are also non-mental concepts, strange as that may sound to the mentalist's ear.)

Moreover, Spinoza's association of the conceptual and the mental within Thought would support mentalism only if he did not also appeal to conceptual relations within non-thinking attributes. But that is exactly what Spinoza does, and not just casually in passages devoted to making other points. In the places where Spinoza needs to be the clearest about the relationship between conceptual relations and the attribute of thought, Spinoza rejects mentalism. These passages occur in the early stages of Part Two, where Spinoza discusses the relationship between modes of different attributes. As expected, these passages are full of appeals to the conceptual, but it becomes clear that Spinoza does not intend such conceptual appeals to be exclusively claims about or "from within" the attribute of thought, lest he violate some of the very attribute doctrines he is explicating.

Consider first the demonstration of IIp1, the claim that thought is an attribute of God. It begins,

Singular thoughts, or this or that thought, are modes that express God's nature in a certain and determinate way (by Ip25c). Therefore (by Id5) there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular thoughts involve, and through which they are also conceived.

So far, this is compatible with mentalism. The concept of the attribute of thought – God conceived as thinking – involves or contains all particular and partial thoughts. That is, there is a complete way of conceiving God that conceptually contains all partial ideas (cf. IIp11c). Since this is a claim about the attribute of thought, such appeals to conceptual containment are consistent with mentalism.

However, in the next proposition, Spinoza claims that extension is also an attribute of God. This is a terribly controversial idea; Spinoza offers us a mere wave of his hand in demonstrating it: "The demonstration of this proceeds in the same way as that of the preceding proposition". If we were to fill in this disappointing ellipsis literally, the demonstration of IIp2 would contain the following sub-conclusion, modeled on IIp1d: *Therefore (by Id5) there belongs to God an attribute whose concept all singular bodies involve, and through which they are also conceived.*¹⁷

On the mentalist reading, however, this would be a very troubling sub-conclusion. Spinoza would be appealing to conceptual – i.e., mental – relations between bodies and extension in his proof that extension is an attribute. Can mental facts, even mental facts that represent extended facts, help prove the existence of extended facts? Spinoza's application of his at-

¹⁷ Gueroult offers the same reconstruction (Gueroult 1974, 40). For a very different reply to worries about idealism stemming from IIp2, see Gueroult 1974, 41–43.

tribute independence doctrine in Ip10s suggests no. For if the fact that a substance has the attribute of thought cannot be used to explain why a substance *lacks* the attribute of extension, surely the fact that a substance has the attribute of thought also cannot be used to explain why a substance *has* the attribute of extension. Yet if conceptual relations just are relations of Thought, then by appealing to conceptual relations between bodies to prove that God is extended, Spinoza will have thereby appealed to Thought to prove that God is extended.

Even worse, on mentalism, the reconstructed IIp2 would assert that bodies themselves – not simply the representations of them – are *mentally* involved in the attribute of thought, since bodies are conceptually involved in and conceived through Extension. But such conceptual involvement, understood under mentalism as a form of mental containment, would again be at odds with Spinoza's attribute independence doctrine. If conceiving an F through a G just is for an F to bear a relation of mental dependence on G, as mentalism would have it, then *bodies cannot be conceived through Extension*. But Spinoza clearly states that bodies *are* conceived through extension. So, using only a very weak principle of interpretive charity, we should conclude that Spinoza believes conceiving through is not an exclusively mental relation.

Put differently, although Spinoza's attribute independence thesis rules out any bleeding of the *mental* into Extension, he thinks attribute independence tolerates a bleeding of the *conceptual* into Extension. My weakly charitable conclusion: Spinoza must want to distinguish the conceptual relations that obtain between bodies and Extension from mental relations, in which case Spinoza is no mentalist. This also invites a far less problematic way of reading IIp1–2: Spinoza invokes an attribute-neutral conceptual involvement relation, and he applies it first to the attribute of thought and its ideas, and then to the attribute of extension and its bodies.

Spinoza makes a similar point in IIp6c:

From this it follows that the formal being of things which are not modes of thinking does not follow from the divine nature because God has first known the things; rather, the objects of ideas follow from and are inferred from their attributes in the same way and by the same necessity as that which we have shown ideas to follow from the attribute of thought.

Although some of the details of this corollary may be obscure, the relevant point is clear: mental dependence – relations among God's ideas – is not the way in which non-mental things follow from God. Rather, the modes of different attributes depend on those attributes *in the same way*, a reference that explicitly cuts across the various attribute contexts. Bodies follow from Extension *in the same way* that ideas follow from Thought. What is this cross-attribute *way* in which all types of modes depend on their attributes? Given Spinoza's account of causation (see section 2) and the context of IIp6 itself,

Spinoza's answer is that being conceived through is one, if not the only, non-attribute specific "way" of following-from. Such a form of dependence cannot, then, be identified with an exclusively mental relation, *pace* mentalism.¹⁸

The attribute-neutrality of the conceptual, which I will discuss below, is reinforced in IIp6d. After invoking his attribute independence doctrine, Spinoza concludes, "So the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their own attribute, but not of another one". (He repeats a more general version of this in the *TTP*: "it is certain that all things which are in nature involve and express the concept of God"; G III/60.) Once again, on the mentalist reading of conceptual relations, this is a scandalous claim: *modes are conceptually involved in their own attributes*. How can that be? For if all conceptual involvement relations are mental, this would mean that non-mental modes bear a *mental* relation to a non-mental attribute. This, in the very passage in which Spinoza leans on the independence of the attributes! While bodies can be represented by ideas, bodies themselves are supposed to be non-mental modes for Spinoza. But bodies cannot remain free from the mental if bodies enter into mental dependence relations. So if conceptual relations are just mental relations, then Spinoza's claim in IIp6d represents a stunningly blatant violation of attribute independence. Once again, a far less problematic reading of IIp6d is that bodies and ideas bear the same kind of relation to their own attributes, one that Spinoza calls "conceptual involvement". If so, then such conceptual relations cut across attribute contexts; conceptual relations outstrip mental relations.

At best, the mentalist reading of IIp6d requires the conceptual involvement claim to be elliptical for "the *mental representations* of the modes of each attribute are conceptually contained in the *mental representations* of their own attributes, but not *the mental representations* of another one". However, while such textual massaging would make IIp6d consistent with the independence and parity of the attributes, it comes at a very high price: it forces us to miss Spinoza's actual point in IIp6.

According to IIp6, "the modes of each attribute have God for their cause only insofar as he is considered under the attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as he is considered under any other attribute". In other words, the way a mode is conceived partly determines which causal chains it stands in.¹⁹ On mentalism, however, IIp6 would only tell us about how causal chains are represented or thought about. Yet Spinoza is clearly trying to say in IIp6 that bodies *qua* bodies do not have mental causes, not

¹⁸ Very similar points could be made about IId1, IIp5, and IIp7, in which the conceptual relations Spinoza uses cannot consistently be taken as purely mental relations, although showing this becomes repetitive. I will emphasize a different point about these passages below.

¹⁹ Spinoza uses "conceiving" and "considering" interchangeably between IIp6 and IIp6d; more on this below.

simply that bodies are represented as having no mental causes. Hence, on mentalism, Spinoza's important and intriguing metaphysical assertion about the causal isolation of modes within attributes flattens into a purely mental thesis about how the world is represented, a claim about only Thought.

Mentalism would also flatten and violate Spinoza's attribute parallelism doctrine. Spinoza summarizes this doctrine in IIp7s as "whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of extension or under the attribute of thought or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order or one and the same connection of causes, that is (*hoc est*), the same things follow one another". What follows "*hoc est*" is an assertion about a causal parallelism between modes of different attributes. On the assumption of mentalism, however, the conceptual claims at the beginning of this passage mean that Spinoza's conclusion is *merely* a point about and within Thought, namely that ideas of bodies are parallel to ideas of ideas. This excessively weak reading of parallelism in Spinoza will not do. Parallelism, I claimed in the previous section, is partly an *inter*-attribute thesis (IIp21); mentalism forces us to read it as only *intra*-attribute. So much the worse for mentalism, I conclude.

Happily, Spinoza's robust doctrine of parallelism also provides the non-mentalist interpreter with a positive account of those passages in which Spinoza off-handedly associates conceptual and mental relations. For although conceptual relations are not exclusively or fundamentally mental for Spinoza, the grasping and representing of conceptual relations *is* an activity of Thought. Given Spinoza's inter-attribute parallelism, it will be true that for every conceptual relation, there exists a corresponding mental relation between ideas, as well as a more complex idea representing those two ideas and their relation, *ad infinitum*. Thus there will be non-trivial, mutual entailments between conceptual and mental facts. However, Spinoza is careful to avoid assimilating mutual entailments to identity, an assimilation the mentalist reading unfortunately makes.

That may seem like too easy a diagnosis, for it is hard to shake the sense that Spinoza sometimes tightly associates the mental and the conceptual without relying on an upshot of his parallelism. For instance, Spinoza sometimes uses synonyms for "conceiving" that have even stronger mental overtones, such as "considering".²⁰ But when he is being careful, Spinoza uses even those synonyms in non-exclusively mental ways, connotations be damned. This is clear in IIId1, IIp5 and IIp7s:

- (1) "By a body I understand a mode that in a certain and determinate way expresses God's essence *insofar as he is considered as an extended thing*" (IIId1, emphasis mine).

²⁰ Additional synonyms include "attending to" (in IIp1s) and "comprehended" (in IIp7s).

- (2) “The formal being of ideas admits God as a cause *only insofar as he is considered as a thinking thing*, and not insofar as he is explained by any other attribute” (IIp5, emphasis mine).
- (3) “Hence *so long as things are considered as modes of thinking*, we must explain the order of the whole of nature, or the connection of causes, through the attribute of thought alone. And *insofar as they are considered as modes of extension*, the order of the whole of Nature must be explained through the attribute of extension alone” (IIp7s, emphases mine).

“Considered as” in these passages, twice related to explanatory contexts, is not an exclusively mental activity, or else the explanatory barrier between the attributes is violated in some of the passages in which Spinoza puts it to its greatest use. This would be especially shocking in (1), in which Spinoza is defining an attribute-specific entity. His point in (1) is that bodies are modes of God’s attribute of extension; he is not making a claim about how bodies are represented in the mind. So “God considered as Extended” is not equivalent to “God thought about as Extended”. It is more like the attribute-neutral expression, God “as falling under” or “as structured by” the attribute of extension. This implies that even Spinoza’s appeals to “considering” should not always be taken to be appeals to relations of Thought.

Therefore, on the basis of these passages in Part Two of the *Ethics*, I conclude that Spinoza rejects mentalism. The alternatives are either to read him as blatantly violating his attribute doctrines in the very places in which he most develops and relies on them, or else to heavy-handedly push aside his clear and frequent textual appeals to the conceptual. Neither option is very attractive, especially when there is a non-mentalist alternative. At various points, I have hinted at one such alternative account of conceptual relations: conceiving as an attribute-neutral relation. Although this positive thesis is logically distinct from my primary thesis in this paper, that Spinoza rejects mentalism, I will now show how this positive claim can be integrated into other features of Spinoza’s ontology.²¹

3.1 Attribute-Neutrality

In distinguishing conceptual relations from mental relations, I suggested that conceptual relations for Spinoza are not attribute-specific. They are “neutral” with respect to any particular attribute. In this section, I will say more about what this means in the context of the rest of Spinoza’s ontology.

²¹ This will not be a defense as much as an elaboration, since my primary thesis is that Spinoza distinguishes the mental from the conceptual. If there turn out to be better non-mentalist ways of positively fleshing out Spinoza’s theory of the conceptual, my main thesis here would still hold. (I am grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting adding the next section.)

I would like to stress up front that by characterizing conceptual relations as attribute-neutral, I do not intend to introduce a new category into Spinoza's metaphysics. Rather, my appeal to attribute-neutrality is meant to utilize a formal category that is *already present* in Spinoza's system. Spinoza sometimes describes objects and their relations in non-attribute specific ways. My proposal in this section is that conceptual relations are one such category of attribute-neutral relations in Spinoza's ontology. I will focus here on the relations between an attribute, on the one hand, and God and God's modes, on the other.²²

Spinoza defines God as "a being (*ens*) absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses [an/the] eternal and infinite essence" (Id6). To be God is to be a substance that consists of, or is constituted by (Id4), an infinity of essence-expressing attributes.²³ This is a kind of meta-attribute claim, one that is *about* attributes but is not made from "within" any attribute. God is a substance that bears a relation to an infinity of distinct attributes.

Spinoza names this relation in an undeclared axiom in Ip10s: "Indeed, nothing in Nature is clearer than that each being (*ens*) must be conceived under some attribute". His claim is that each *ens* – itself an attribute-neutral category – must be conceived under at least one particular attribute.²⁴ So each *ens* or substance bears the relation *conceived under* to at least one attribute, a relation that is therefore not itself attribute-specific. Spinoza is, at it were, stepping outside all the attribute contexts and claiming, about those contexts, that each substance falls under at least one of them (and, in God's case, all of them). "Conceived under", in other words, names in the meta-language the relation that every substance bears to at least one attribute. This means that *conceived under* is not itself an attribute-specific relation, such as *thought about as*. Instead, it characterizes how a substance relates to any of its attributes: it is conceived under them.

Spinoza also characterizes finite modes in an attribute-neutral way: they are particular things (*res*) that express an attribute in a certain and determi-

²² There are other, equally "neutral" roles for conceptual relations in Spinoza's system, such as conceptual *dependence*. But my goal here is to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

²³ Two longstanding disputes in Spinoza interpretation, which I will not try to settle here, lurk nearby. One turns on whether Spinoza thinks constitution is identity: is a substance identical to its attributes (as suggested by Ip4d) or is it constituted by, but not identical to, its attributes (as suggested by IIp1d)? The other concerns whether "essence" in the definition of God takes a definite or indefinite article. If definite, then God's essence is somehow wholly expressed by each of infinitely many, non-overlapping attributes. If indefinite, then God's essence is really a kind of second-order essence: the Divine essence is that which has every first-order essence expressed by an attribute.

²⁴ Spinoza does not use the term "*ens*" very often in the *Ethics*, but when he does, it is almost always to refer to God or substance (see Id6, Ip10s, Ip11s, Ip14d, IVp28). Once he cites it as an example of a transcendental universal (IIp40s).

nate way.²⁵ “Particular things are nothing but affections of God’s attributes, or modes by which God’s attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way” (Ip25c).²⁶ Spinoza later names those attribute-neutral things insofar as they express specific attributes: *bodies* are particular things that express Extension, and *ideas* are particular things that express Thought. Hence, ideas are to concepts as bodies are to “particular things”.²⁷ With some labels: bodies (attribute-specific) are particular things (attribute-neutral) that express (attribute-neutral) God’s essence in a certain and determinate way (attribute-neutral) insofar as God is conceived under (attribute-neutral) Extension (attribute specific).

Spinoza elegantly combines and utilizes these attribute-neutral features in his mind-body identity theory.²⁸ According to this theory, mental modes are identical to parallel extended modes in the same way that God under the attribute of Thought is identical to God under the attribute of Extension: they are one and the same *thing*, just as the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same *ens*. Spinoza himself draws the parallel between God under different attributes and a finite thing under different attributes:

[T]he thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways (IIP7s).

Spinoza then gives the following elaboration, in which “circle existing in Nature” is a body:

For example, a circle existing in Nature and the idea of the existing circle, which is also in God, are *one and the same thing*, which is explained through different attributes. Therefore, whether we conceive Nature under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, that is, that *the same things* follow one another (IIP7s, emphasis mine).

²⁵ Unlike with “*ens*”, Spinoza uses the general term “*res*” to refer to both substances and modes (e.g., IIP1 and IP27), although I will focus on the mode references here. Another clear example of attribute-neutrality occurs in the conclusion to IIP7s, where Spinoza refers to “things as they are in themselves”, by which he means things independent of any particular attribute.

²⁶ By contrast, infinite modes are pervasive ways of expressing an attribute. In other words, the contrast between finite and infinite modes involves the “certain and determinate” part of IP25c, not the “things that express an attribute” part (see IP21–22).

²⁷ As mentioned previously, there are contexts, such as when clearly referring within Thought, where it would be natural for Spinoza to casually equate concepts and ideas, just as there are contexts, such as when clearly referring within Extension, in which it would be acceptable to casually equate bodies and particular things.

²⁸ For a defense of the identity-theory interpretation, see Della Rocca 1996.

Notice how Spinoza uses his attribute-neutral category (“thing”) and terminological substitutions to make the point about modes that he had made about God: parallel modes are “one and the same thing” that fall under, are explained by, are expressions of, and are conceived through, different attributes. A body is the same *thing* as its parallel idea: one *thing* conceived under two different attributes. God qua thinking is the same *ens* as God qua extended: one *ens* conceived under two different attributes. In both cases, “conceiving under” names the identity-preserving way that beings and particular things, substances and finite modes, relate to attributes.

Therefore, “*x* conceived under [Extension/Thought]”, where “*x*” names an attribute-neutral *ens* or *thing*, does not mean “*x* as represented by a mind as” or “*x* as thought about as”, for Spinoza. I think the closest rewording of “*x* conceived as” and “*x* considered as” is the one alluded to at the end of the previous section: “*x* insofar as it is structured thusly”, or perhaps “*x* insofar as it is characterized thusly”, where “thusly” names an attribute context. And at bottom, I believe this is what Spinoza intends by his conceptual language when referring to attributes: God and finite things are conceived as, i.e., structured by, a multiplicity of highly general, pervasive, and fundamental features such as Extension and Thought. Spinoza’s preferred designation for the attribute-neutral, fundamental manner by which these entities are metaphysically structured is conceptual in kind.

4. *Mentalism, Idealism, and Della Rocca’s Spinoza*

I have argued that interpreting Spinoza as a mentalist would force us to read him as violating several of his own core attribute doctrines. To give this thesis more teeth, I will now show how one prominent interpreter, Michael Della Rocca, inadvertently succumbs to the mentalist’s trap and produces just such a problematic reading of Spinoza.

Much of Della Rocca’s early interpretive work focused on Spinoza’s philosophy of mind, in which he presented important accounts of Spinoza’s theories of mental representation, mind-body identity, and the conceptual barrier between attributes. Central to Della Rocca’s account of Spinoza’s philosophy of mind is Spinoza’s rationalism, embodied in the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). More recently, Della Rocca has presented the PSR as *the* philosophical engine driving virtually all of Spinoza’s reasoning, from metaphysics to ethics to politics.²⁹

There is much that is correct in Della Rocca’s hyper-rationalist interpretation of Spinoza. But in virtue of the way he understands and applies Spinoza’s rationalism, his interpretation falls victim to all the flaws of the men-

²⁹ This thesis is the central claim of his most recent book, Della Rocca 2008b.

talist reading. For, according to Della Rocca, Spinoza identifies conceiving and explaining with mental relations of understanding and rendering intelligible. That is, the centrality of the conceptual and the explicable becomes, in Della Rocca, the centrality of the intelligible, the mental and ultimately of Thought.

To see the mentalism at work in Della Rocca's interpretation, notice first that he explicitly equates Spinoza's rationalist priority of the conceptual and the explicable with the priority of the mental and the psychological. "For Spinoza, all philosophical problems bottom out in intelligibility itself [...] he insists that each thing is intelligible, there are no facts impervious to explanation".³⁰ After gliding between intelligibility and explicability, Della Rocca claims that "The PSR is thus the embodiment of Spinoza's commitment to intelligibility".³¹ This slide is not new to Della Rocca's interpretation of Spinoza. Citing texts such as Iax5, Della Rocca wrote in his earlier book, "Spinoza treats as equivalent the notion of conceiving a thing and that of understanding a thing or rendering it intelligible".³²

Della Rocca's blurring of the psychological and the metaphysical in Spinoza via mentalism is most pronounced in his interpretation of metaphysical dependence in Spinoza. According to Della Rocca's Spinoza,

all things that exist follow from the very nature of God and follow from that nature with logical or conceptual necessity. For Spinoza, if one really understood what the nature of God is, one would see that it's absolutely necessary that God exists and that all the things that we observe in the world exist.³³

The second sentence, I take it, is supposed to be an elucidation, not simply an entailment, of the first. This means that Spinoza's thesis about the conceptual dependence of everything on God is just a thesis about how everything is understood or made intelligible through God, a kind of tight mental dependence of all things on God. That Della Rocca intends this mentalist reading is reinforced in other passages in which he discusses Spinoza's views on dependence. On *causation*: "[Spinoza] accounts for causation by appealing to conceivability or explicability or intelligibility itself".³⁴ On *inherence*: "Thus to say that one thing inheres in another is to say simply that it is understood or conceived through or intelligible in terms of this other".³⁵ And on *ontological priority* in general, he begins, "What exactly does this [ontological] priority amount to? For Spinoza, as well as for Descartes, it is conceptual priority". That last sentence is correct as it stands for Spinoza, but Della Rocca then adds the following mentalist para-

³⁰ Della Rocca 2008b, 2.

³¹ Della Rocca 2008b, 4; see also Della Rocca 2008b, 92.

³² Della Rocca 1996, 3.

³³ Della Rocca 2008b, 10.

³⁴ Della Rocca 2008b, 45.

³⁵ Della Rocca 2008b, 68.

phrase of such conceptual priority: “One can have the idea of a substance without having ideas of its modes”.³⁶

In short, for Della Rocca’s Spinoza, concepts are identical to ideas, conceptual dependence is identical to dependence between ideas, and the conceptual – that centerpiece of Spinoza’s rationalist metaphysics – becomes the purely mental and, indeed, the psychological. Thus, in addition to paving the way for an idealist reading of Spinoza, Della Rocca’s interpretation becomes vulnerable to all the objections against mentalism I raised in the previous section.³⁷ Thought becomes a kind of lopsided Super-attribute (*pace* attribute parity and plentitude); parallelism flattens into something merely intra-attribute (*pace* attribute parallelism); and the mental bleeds over into the non-mental (*pace* attribute independence).³⁸

We can escalate the inappropriately idealistic implications of Della Rocca’s interpretation even more. For suppose we accept Della Rocca’s recent thesis that, according to Spinoza, existence itself just is intelligibility. Here is how Della Rocca explains that striking idea: “the mere intelligibility of a thing is the existence of that thing [...] in all cases, the existence of a thing is its intelligibility”.³⁹ On this account, not only is the nature of a thing its intelligible (i.e., mental) status, its *existence* too just is its mental status. In other words, idealism-cum-mentalism infects not only what *kinds* of things exist for Della Rocca’s Spinoza; what it is to exist at all becomes the purview of the intelligible, the psychological, the mental. As he puts it in slogan form, “For Spinoza, to be is to be intelligible”.⁴⁰ And that, it seems to me, makes Della Rocca’s reading of Spinoza the most thoroughly idealist

³⁶ Della Rocca 2008b, 48.

³⁷ For a discussion of other aspects of idealism in Della Rocca’s interpretation (and their historical antecedents), see Newlands 2011.

³⁸ In personal correspondence (December 2008, quoted with permission), Della Rocca understandably objects to these charges. For example, he explains that on his account, “for bodies to involve the concept of extension is for them to be conceived through extension [...]. I don’t think that for bodies to be conceived through extension violates the isolation between the attributes”. But if conceiving through is a purely mental relation, Della Rocca’s assertion *does* posit a mental dependence between bodies and extension in virtue of positing a conceptual dependence, *pace* attribute independence. Della Rocca also points out that on his interpretation, “What it is for a body to be parallel to an idea is for the idea to be conceived through a pattern of ideas that is isomorphic to the pattern of bodies that the body is conceived through”. That seems correct as it stands, unless one collapses the conceptual into the mental, in which case his claim is just that parallelism holds between patterns of ideas and patterns of the mental representations of bodies (“the pattern of bodies that the body is conceived through”, i.e., mentally represented as standing in), a flattening of attribute parallelism to a claim about Thought alone.

³⁹ Della Rocca 2008b, 263; see also the quick inference from God’s existence is God’s *conceivability* to God’s existence is God’s *intelligibility* on the previous page. Similar claims are found in Della Rocca 2008a.

⁴⁰ Della Rocca 2008b, 9.

reading offered to date – and vulnerable to all the attendant worries of mentalism, including here the creation of a Super-attribute of thought in which all existents are contained.

But what forces Della Rocca's interpretation into this lopsided position? It is not his insistence on the primacy of the conceptual or his assertion that Spinoza's demands for explanation motivate and even animate his most central doctrines. I too accept many of those claims. Rather, it is Della Rocca's view, often implicit, that the realm of the explicable and the conceptual just is the realm of the mental and the ideal. If instead, as I have suggested here, we understand Spinoza's appeals to the conceptual to be purely metaphysical, instead of broadly mental, we avoid flattening and violating Spinoza's attribute doctrines. Maintaining the attribute-neutrality of the conceptual – that bedrock of relations in Spinoza's system – is the key to thwarting these pitfalls of mentalism. I suspect Della Rocca would agree that Spinoza's rationalism demands and requires more than merely the mental. I have argued here that separating conceiving from thinking, the conceptual from the mental, is how Spinoza achieves it.⁴¹

Once the mentalist lens is shed, we can see just how thoroughly *anti-idealist* Spinoza's system actually is. Thought is but one attribute among many equals for Spinoza. In the end, Spinoza avoids idealism precisely by insisting that the realm of the extended, and the non-mental more generally, is as conceptually structured, metaphysically basic, and explanatorily transparent as the realm of the ideal.

5. Coda

I will conclude by returning to Bennett's original lopsidedness objection to the definition of an attribute in Id4. I have argued in this paper that Spinoza's appeals to the conceptual, especially in the context of the relation between attributes, ought to be understood as attribute-neutral rather than purely mental. What, then, should we make of those passages in which Spinoza writes about the nature of attributes in overtly mental – although notably *not* conceptual – terms? Consider Spinoza's perpetually bedeviling Id4: "By attribute, I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance

⁴¹ In correspondence (December 2008, quoted with permission), Della Rocca makes an acute observation that helps frame our differences: "I suspect that what's at stake here is how much one can interpret Spinoza in a broadly Fregean/Russellian spirit. I think I'm turning my back on Frege and Russell in my interpretation of Spinoza, you're trying to make Spinoza more Frege friendly." I agree that my insistence that Spinoza avoids the pitfalls of the pre-Fregean psychologism by appealing to a kind of extra-mental conceptual structure has a distinctively Fregean ring to it, although I would hasten to add that these ways of conceiving for Spinoza are decidedly *not* abstract Platonic entities à la Fregean *Gedanken*. (For a bit more on Spinoza and Frege, see Newlands forthcoming.)

as constituting its essence". Spinoza here defines an attribute in terms of a mental relation, and it would be beyond the bounds of interpretive plausibility to claim that by "intellect" in these passages Spinoza also means something attribute-neutral.⁴²

Would that Spinoza *had* written Id4 in conceptual terms instead, perhaps along the lines of what Della Rocca presents as a "more perspicuous" rendering of Id4: "By attribute I understand that which constitutes the essence of a substance under some description or way of conceiving that substance".⁴³ Della Rocca's reconstruction elides the reference to an intellect altogether, although in virtue of his assumption of mentalism, the elision is insignificant for him. But while this rendering of Id4 would be preferable and unobjectionable on the non-mentalist reading I have advocated, it would also be revisionary.

So I must admit that rejecting mentalism will not remove *every* element of Thought-heavy, idealist-friendly tendencies in Spinoza's writings, though it handles many of them. However, there are good reasons, independent of questions about mentalism, to be suspicious of Spinoza's reference to an intellect in Id4. For if Id4 is to be consistent with the attribute doctrines presented in section 2, then Id4 does not provide what *Spinoza himself* requires of a proper definition. I will conclude by showing why Id4 raises this problem for most interpretations, not just non-mentalist ones.

Most interpreters now reject what is known as the "subjectivist" reading of the attributes, according to which the multiplicity of attributes is entirely constructed by the mental activities of finite intellects. And it should be rejected: attribute subjectivism would violate Spinoza's plenitude, parity, and parallelism attribute doctrines. In the wake of Martial Gueroult's decisive refutation of attribute subjectivism,⁴⁴ the main interpretive consensus is that the intellect of Id4 represents *what is already and independently there*, namely the infinitely rich nature of God. Although the (infinite) intellect represents all that constitutes an essence of a substance, such representations do not *create* the essence(s) of substance.

All of us who accept this "objectivist" interpretation of the attributes must then conclude that Id4 is an improper definition by Spinoza's own account of proper definitions. Proper definitions, according to Spinoza, are genetic; they express the *causes* of the definiendum, not simply necessary entailments.⁴⁵ However, according to the objectivist interpretation, the intellect's perceptions in Id4 are *not* the causes of its objects. So at best, Id4

⁴² See also Ep9.

⁴³ Della Rocca 1996, 166. Spinoza uses "conceived through" and "referred to" interchangeably in IIIDefAffIe.

⁴⁴ Gueroult 1968, 428–468. (Cf. Steven Nadler's recent claim that the subjectivist reading has been "well refuted in the literature" in Nadler 2007, 130.)

⁴⁵ TIE 95f.; Ep60.

states a *propria* of an attribute; it does not give an essence-specifying definition. Therefore, although Spinoza's appeal to an intellect in Id4 is not outright false, it nevertheless should not have appeared in a proper definition, according to his own principles.

Happily, Spinoza's wording of Id4 does not present a special problem for my non-mentalistic interpretation. This is not surprising, since Id4 does not mention conceptual relations in the first place. The real choice over Id4 is between accepting attribute-subjectivism and the denial of core attribute doctrines, on the one hand, and rejecting the original wording of Id4 as an improper Spinozistic definition, on the other. Unfortunately, this choice is faced regardless of how one comes down on the issue of mentalism in Spinoza. So distinguishing the mental from the conceptual will not by itself remove *every* worry of inconsistency facing Spinoza's attribute claims, though I have argued in this paper that it solves many of them. In the end, I, like everyone else in the non-subjectivist camp, must cede this much to Bennett's original concern: by his own principles, Spinoza ought to have written Id4 differently. But although non-mentalism is not the source of the problem in Id4, it offers a neat diagnosis and minimalist fix: Spinoza should replace the *intellect's perceptions* of substance's essence in Id4 with the attribute-neutral *ways of conceiving* that he uses so frequently and effectively elsewhere in his *Ethics*.⁴⁶

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 G *Opera*. Ed. C. Gebhardt. 4 vols. Heidelberg 1925. Cited by volume/page.
 KV *Korte Verhandeling van God de Mensch en deszelvs Welstand*.
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 TTP *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

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⁴⁶ Thanks especially to Michael Della Rocca for many lively and friendly discussions on this topic and for permission to quote from some of our correspondence. I am also grateful to Yitzhak Melamed, Alan Nelson, Eric Schliesser, two anonymous referees, and audience members at Leiden University for their helpful comments, criticisms, and encouragements. Research for this paper was supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, for which I remain very thankful.

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